

## INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE: Layering Notes

Layering is a strategy that clarifies the second and third phases of the focused note-taking process by asking students to revisit their notes multiple times, each time with a different purpose in mind. Each layer added to the notes is completed in a different color, so a student's interactions are visible to the instructor and to the student. This not only allows the instructor to assess the quality of the student's thinking and interaction with the content, but it also solidifies learning about the process and the content itself. Additionally, the use of color enhances retention for visual learners.

### Instructional Goals

Students will:

- Add layers of thinking to their notes to process and connect their thinking.
- Use colors to show their repeated interactions with their notes.

### Preparation for Instruction

- If taking notes on paper, students will need a variety of colored pens, colored pencils, highlighters, and markers to use for the note-taking layers.
- Determine what specific layers you will ask your students to complete and in what order. Decide whether students will follow oral instructions for each layer or whether they will receive written instructions to complete at their own pace.
- For maximum benefit, this process should be completed over several days. Some layers could be completed for homework.

### Instructional Strategies

- Provide time for students to complete each layer by adding to their notes with a different color.
- Work on one layer at a time. Consider whether developing learners need more structure or fewer components to add during each layering session, compared with more experienced note-takers.
- *Optional:* Have students keep a key to indicate what color is used for each layer.
- Suggestions for possible layers include the following.
  - **Additions:** Students add to their notes.
    - Record vocabulary, ideas, or concepts they missed the first time or have learned since they wrote the notes.
    - Add markings to indicate important points, vocabulary, or ideas (underline, highlight, star, etc.).

- **Clarifications:** Students review their notes and add to them to clarify points, concepts, or ideas.
  - Look up and add definitions, examples, or synonyms to words or phrases that are unclear or unfamiliar.
  - Rephrase a confusing concept in their own words.
  - Add symbols or pictures to make concepts more clear.
- **Main Ideas:** Students circle, underline, or highlight main ideas in the notes, or write main idea key words in the notes or margins.
- **Concepts and Examples:** Students review concepts and add specific examples to notes.
  - Add examples provided by the textbook.
  - Add examples from teachers, peers, or students' own life experiences.
  - Add examples from things they have read, watched, seen, or heard.
  - Add visuals or memory triggers that connect to the concepts.
- **Making Connections:** Students revisit their notes and think about ways they can connect and apply their learning.
  - Text-to-Text: Identify how the subject, content, or ideas relate to other texts, concepts, or learning they have encountered.
  - Text-to-Self: Identify how the subject, content, or ideas connect to their own life or personal experiences.
  - Text-to-World: Identify how the subject, content, or ideas connect to the world around them.
  - Text-to-Purpose: Identify how the subject, content, or ideas connect to the learning purpose for these notes.
- **Wondering and Questioning:** Students incorporate inquiry into the note-taking process.
  - Develop questions from the notes and add them to the notes. Use Costa's Levels 2 and 3 for higher-level inquiry.
  - Add "I wonder..." questions to the notes.
  - If relevant for the note-taking purpose, turn the headings and section titles into questions that are answered by the notes.
- Collaboration can enhance any phase of the layering process by allowing students to work on the layering or share their markings in pairs or small groups. Students can discuss one another's questions and wonderings together to deepen thinking about the notes.

### Variation

- To increase scaffolding, reduce the number of requirements for each layer, have the students create fewer layers, provide more specific parameters, or allow students to process and add to their notes with a partner or small group. The instructor can also model the layering process on a set of sample notes using a document camera.